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Abraham Lincoln and religion

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SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

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SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS *is an international quarterly review dedicated to peace and friendship among the peoples of all nations through respect for moral and spiritual principles indispensable for the survival and growth of human rights and world civilization. It welcomes writers of all nationalities to contribute articles - long or short - to share of their culture, scholarship and wisdom toward creating a new world society which will truly be t'ien hsia i chia, "One family under Heaven."* - THE EDITORS.

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"Chinese lady who talks and counts in Chinese, and eats with her chop sticks, which renders the exhibition highly interesting to lovers of curiosities", Barnum in the next year put on exhibition a whole museum of Chinese figures and curios, and he engaged some living Chinese to exhibit themselves. Among these was "a real Chinese beauty, with feet two-and-one half inches long. Miss Pwan Yee Koo, only 17 years old, the first lady of distinction that has ever left her Lotus Leaf home and has been seen by outside Barbarians." As Odell remarks, "there was no Barnum but Barnum."

Other interesting Chinese visitors could be added to the above list, such as for instance, the ten Chinese whom William Kelly in 1854 imported to operate his steel furnaces in Lyon County, Kentucky, because he found that slave labour was unsatisfactory. The Chinese pleased him so much that he sent for fifty more, but some difficulty arose to prevent their leaving China. There is also the interesting incident of a Chinese who served as a soldier in the Civil War and who later returned to China to become one of the first Chinese to be ordained as an Episcopal minister.

After the discovery of gold in California, Chinese came in thousands, and from the Pacific Coast they slowly drifted to the East to fill the humble positions they have ever since occupied in our cities. They were no longer a novelty but, in the West at least, were considered to be a menace to labour. Dislike now took the place of curiosity and a president rode into the White House on the slogan "The Chinese Must Go."

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LINCOLN SOCIETY

THE MEANINGFULNESS OF MENCIUS ⁽¹⁾

By Yu-Tang D. Lew 劉毓棠

Mencius (372-289 B.C.) has been long and rightly respected as the Second Philosopher of China. If we could think of Confucius as the George Washington of Chinese culture, Mencius is its Abraham Lincoln. For after Confucius had given China the great books containing his wisdom and teachings, the country was in turmoil during the period known as The Warring States. Mencius not only preserved Confucianism, he also strengthened it and thereby ensured its survival and perpetuity.

Mencius is popular and respected in his own right, and not only as the chief disciple of the nation's Primatial Teacher. His dialogues, full of wit and wisdom, are ever delightful to student readers of countless generations since his time. His discourses on government, elevating the place of the people above that of the emperor was nothing less than revolutionary. His candid conversations with kings were those of a courageous and clear-sighted advisor, teacher and sage.

It was Mencius who advanced Confucius' thought to new heights; he ascribed something fundamental, a metaphysical element, to the teaching of Confucianism. He sought to know what is behind the elements that make for good and harmonious human and social relations. In doing so, he gave vitality and new life to

[1] Speech given at The Lincoln Society's Sino-American Friendship Breakfast, Taipei, September 22, 1993.

Confucius' teachings, enabling them to endure through long centuries of a relatively peaceful civilization. In the last book written by Harvard's eminent Professor of Chinese History John K. Fairbank, published in 1992, the statement was made that the modern world can learn from the "survival capacity" of the Chinese. He also said that the industrial civilization has wrought great damage to the human environment and has not produced any remedial idea. Might a new approach to the study of Mencius' thought fill that need?

The entire ethical system of Mencius, both political and social, is based on his recognition of the spiritual, the good nature of man, what Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature." The history of mankind attests to the truth of Mencius' teaching. The spiritual awareness of man brings peace, happiness and order to society and nations. When, in place of it, material consciousness of man instead is dominant, disorder and wars take place.

Most of Mencius' work is in dialogue form, dealing with practical matters. Little is given to stating of principles and ideas. Kings come to him with problems and he defines them, invariably bringing out the spiritual truths involved, which rulers were prone to overlook. Much of the problems deal with relationships between people, a subject as important and relevant today as in his time.

Above and underlying all that Mencius said and taught was the inspiration or realization that the nature of man is good. Where and how he made that discovery is not completely clear. But he was certain of it and dedicated his whole life in propounding this belief. This belief today is commonplace, although its dissenters are by no means a small minority. But in Mencius' time, not even Confucius was so definite in making that claim.

The meaningfulness of Mencius, therefore, lies in this: that in

declaring man's nature to be good, he affirmed that life and creation are spiritual in nature because they are Heaven-endowed. His Book VII opens with this profound statement: "He who has exercised his mind (hsin) to the utmost, knows his nature (hsing). Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven (tien). To preserve his mind and nourish his nature, is the way to serve Heaven. To be without doubleness of mind (or doubt) . . . is to stand in accord with the will of Heaven." (Bk. VII, Ch. i, 2, 3).

This statement, and the philosophy arising from it, has been called by some to be "mystic". Admittedly, it is metaphysical and, indeed, spiritual. Because of its spiritual nature, Confucianism is often, in the West, called a religion. But to all Chinese, Confucianism is not a religion in the theological sense, but teaching. Its philosophy may be said to have assumed most of the functions of religion in China.

A Harvard professor of philosophy recognizes Confucian thought to be one of the richest and longest spiritual traditions in human history. It is a fact of history that the beginnings of China's culture were blessed by the works of Confucius and Mencius and by the paragons of the early Sage-Emperors. They together more than anything else perhaps count for the greatness and longevity of China's civilization. But the tragedies of China's history have been the result of loss or neglect of what Mencius calls "the nobility of heaven", or man's spirituality.

The basic aim of Chinese philosophy has not been primarily that of understanding the world, but that of making people great and teaching them to live at peace and in harmony with one another.

Before the age of Confucius, the sage-emperors Yao and Shun knew of Shang-ti, the God in the classics *Shu-ching* and *Shih-*

ching. But the divinity of God was perceived and expressed in the spiritual attributes found in their moral and practical forms such as Good, Righteousness, Benevolence, Peace, Humility, Truth, Harmony, Commiseration, Endurance, Sincerity, etc. Confucius and Mencius were practical thinkers; their moral ideas when acted upon produced beneficial results.

These teachings have made their impact on Chinese society and history and are still held in high regard. It has been said that our sages were not like the prophets of Israel or other saints who witnessed revelation or actually heard the voice of the Almighty. Yet Mencius' statement that "The Way is not far from man" is correlative to that immortal one made by Jesus Christ. The good in man is the essence of Mencius' teaching, and its corollary is found in Genesis: "God (Good) created man in his own image" and "saw everything that he had made... was very good."

Whence cometh the insights of Mencius? They were in large part drawn from his studies of the earlier classics of Confucius. From what he wrote, we know that the earlier sage-emperors were inspired by the Divinity: "The men of antiquity cultivated their nobility of Heaven (spirituality)" – (Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. xvi, 2). "But the men of the present day... seek for the nobility of man (materiality), and when they have obtained that, they throw away the other (spirituality); – their delusion is extreme. The issue is simply this, that they must lose that (materiality) as well." (ibid., 3). Heaven has its endless ways of communicating with man. The ideas of Confucius and Mencius came not from without them but from within them.

In Mencius we find a deeper understanding of man and his destiny and, therefore, a new hope and means by which to revive and renew Chinese culture and life. While Confucius spoke of the

Superior Man, giving a sense of an elite, Mencius speaks of the Great Man in the ordinary person. This is a modern message for the modern man. Every person is capable of being a Great Man. In fact, it is in every person to be a Great Man. That is because "All things are already complete within us." (Bk. VII, Pt. I, Ch. iv, 1).

"Those who follow that part of themselves which is great are great men; those who follow that part which is little are little men. The sense of hearing and seeing do not think and are obscured by (external) things. When one thing comes into contact with another, as a matter of course it leads it away. To the mind belongs the office of thinking. By thinking it gets the right view of things; by neglecting to think, it fails to do this. These – the senses and the mind – are what Heaven has given to us. Let a man stand first in (the supremacy) of the nobler part of his constitution, and the inferior part will not be able to take it from him. It is simply this that makes the great man." (Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. xv, 1 – 3)

If a man is doubtful of this, that his nature is spiritual and good, his life would not be able to stand in accord with the Tao or Way of Heaven, and this would mean disorder and disharmony. And, as so often is the case, result in disaster and tragedy which are attributed usually to *Ming*, fate.

"The great end of learning is nothing else but to seek for the lost mind." (Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. xi, 4). When our consciousness deviates from our spiritual mind, or nature, it is "lost" in materiality. The "human nobility" of the senses has replaced our spiritual consciousness, our "heavenly nobility" (divine). Therefore to Mencius, the essence of education is in cultivating the consciousness of the *Mind*. Consequently, the educational tradition in China has largely been inculcation of the Confucian

ethics, that of rectifying the heart, harmonizing the home, ordering the nation and fostering peace in the world.

Being great has a twin aspect in Chinese thought. First, it involves inner greatness which is a magnitude of spirit reflected in the peace and contentment of the individual in his completeness. Second, it involves outer greatness, which is manifested in the ability to live well in daily life, dignifying the social context in which one lives. This ideal is called "sageliness within and kingliness without."

Since greatness of persons is the basic concern, consideration for people comes first. The human world is primary; the world of things is of secondary importance. Thus, emphasis on human greatness leads naturally to emphasis on ethics and the spiritual life. The spirit, rather than the body, is the most important aspect of being human. For this development the moral life is the first prerequisite. In Confucianism, there is virtually no distinction between the moral and the spiritual.

How does Mencius account for evil? He said evil is due to external circumstances. The good nature of man can be distorted by the externals of life. Society and culture are therefore responsible for the presence of wrong actions and evil in the world. Evil is also due to the abandonment of self; people deviate from their innate goodness. Rather than allowing their nature to manifest itself in goodness, they forsake it and do evil instead. Again, evil is due to a failure to nourish the feeling within us to support and to follow the good in one's nature.

Man by nature being good, all that he truly thinks and does are bound to succeed and result in good to mankind. In fact, "There is no joy that exceeds that of being conscious of true sincerity" (Bk. VII, Pt. I, Ch. 4). But in practice this is not

always so, for the majority of people do not follow the Way. "The Way lies close at hand, yet men seek for it afar. Duty is not hard, yet men seek it in the most difficult things".

Why does this happen? Because though "Love being in man's heart and righteousness being his path, he gives up the road and forfeits his heart. That is the tragedy. If a fowl or a dog strays we know how to find them again, but if the mind strays we don't know how to regain it. The whole purport of education is nothing more than this: to regain the mind that has strayed." (Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. 11).

To Confucianists, the means of coping with and overcoming evil is by studying and acquiring knowledge. *Ta Hsueh* - The Great Learning - today's term for "university", consists of *ming ming teh*, that is, to understand the clear virtue by which to *chin min* (or loving the people), following which one culminates in resting upon the supreme good, or *jir yi jih shan*.

Thus, "Knowledge" is not of the phenomenal physical world of the senses so much as the world of human values. Sincerity, for example, engenders good relationships. But Mencius says further, that sincerity *per se* is divine in nature. Sincerity "is the way of heaven" (Bk. IV, Pt. I. Ch. xii). All that is good is real, is divine, and spiritual.

True knowledge is gained from *Liang-jih* which directs man specifically to do the good and the right thing. In Book VII, Pt. I, Ch. xv, we read this momentous statement: "That which man is capable of doing without having to learn is Liang-Neng - the Good Ability. That which man knows without being anxious about is Liang-jih - Good Knowledge." From Mencius we learn that Liang-Neng and Liang-Jih are Heaven-endowed and in every person - every man, woman and child.

This is the *ming ming teh* which begins, or is the first step of, the true education or *ta hsueh* of man. For, "All men have in themselves that which is noble (*Guei*). Only they do not think of it." (Book VI, Pt. I Ch. xvii, 1). When men don't think of it, they are liable to lose it and content themselves with something less noble, the *hsiao ti*. The *Guei* in us is the *da ti*, the Great Entity (Substance), belonging to the Spiritual or Divine Nobility (*Tien Jir*) in man. But we rather think in terms or use of our *hsiao ti*, the Small Entity, which consists of our five senses and our bodies composed of blood, bones and brain. At most this gains for us the Human Nobility which is less or below our real nature, the "better angels".

These are the noble qualities "which make us the same in kind with the sages". (Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. vii, 3). The sages differ from us, Mencius says, only in being the first to discover those things which all hearts have in common. (Ibid.) We have something in common with them, the Sage-emperors, says Mencius. That something is *Guei*, Spiritual Nobility. How can we adhere to the higher nobility in man, or distinguish between the two Nobilities, one spiritual, one material? The Liang-Jih – the Good Knowledge which Heaven endows in every man – can do that for us. It tells us what we do not know and even without our thinking. All we need to do is to listen to its voice within our heart. It gives us the Good Ability – the Spiritual Power to do what it tells us.

The sages were keenly sensitive to Liang-Jih and Liang-Neng. It was they and their tradition which enabled China to survive through centuries of foreign invasion and natural disasters and internal strife. But we have now come to an age where the whole world is our neighbor and now threatened by the inhumanity of

man to man with his scientific weapons of destruction, mass and otherwise. No longer are sages enough in numbers or in time to stem the tide of human destruction in all its varied disguises. This is the age of democracy and of the common man, of machines and the masses.

In Mencius we can find that which enables us to meet this challenge in time. The Liang-Jih and Liang-Neng in us can be activated by every man, woman and child simply by listening quietly to its speaking to us in our hearts. It may not be so easy for adults to hearken to the Liang-Jih in us. But they can if they have the "childlike heart". For not only is it easy for children to listen to the Liang-Jih, what is more, they enjoy doing it, like little ducks taking to water. Most times the Liang-Jih is instinctive, as in Mencius' famous example of anyone's reaction to the child about to fall into a well. All other times, that "innate or intuitive" knowledge and ability are present, without the person being aware of it.

"Most people," Mencius observed, "do things without knowing what they do, and go on doing them without any thought as to what they are doing. They do this all their lives without ever understanding the Way." (Bk. VII, Pt. I, Ch. iii). This is to say, people don't listen to "Liang-Jih" and without this "understanding of the Way," there is no "Liang-Neng" enabling them to succeed in the good that they are attempting to do.

We are discovering in Mencius today the way to renovate our educational system of keeping abreast with the modern means of intellectual training without discarding our time-tested traditional emphasis on moral education.

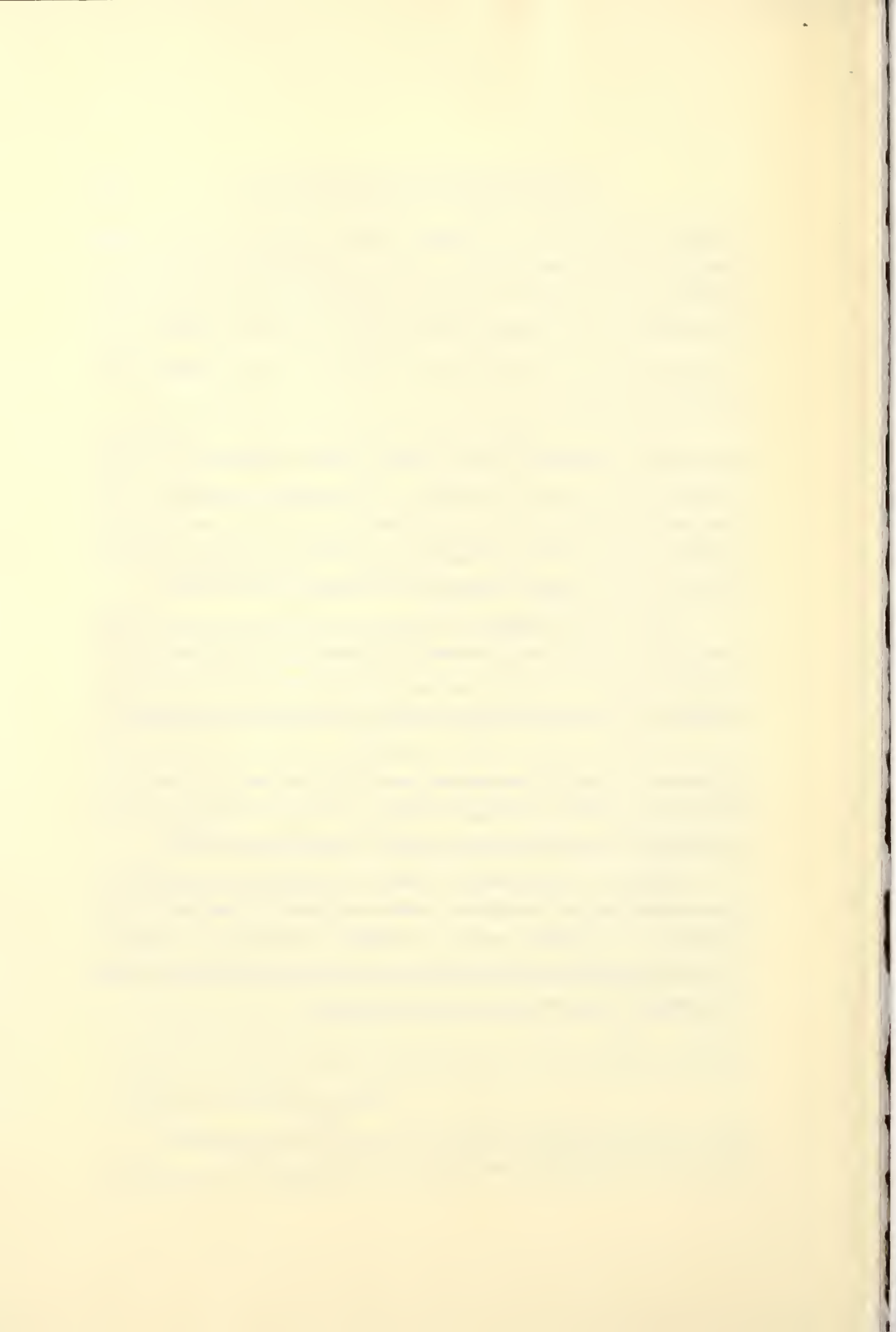
The discovery that one can actually and actively listen to the inner voice of Liang-Jih in our daily lives will have a transforming

effect on the future of Chinese culture and society. For we no longer need to passively wait for the Liang-Jih to speak to us. Instead, we can take the initiative of hearkening to it and awaiting its messages. This simple process can be easily and quickly – even instantaneously – understood and undertaken by any person – man, woman or child.

Today, the emphasis of education has been on intellectual disciplines in science and technology. Moral education is being relegated to the back of the room. This trend has become virtually universal and the result is social disarray which has become all too apparent even in the “developed” countries of the West and North as in the “undeveloped” nations of the East and the South.

We in the Republic of China on Taiwan are also being confronted with this modern challenge to education. It is imperative for us to find and apply the answer to this challenge. Unless we do so, not only will the world continue floundering in the uncertain seas of social instability, but our very hope of democratic reunification may be vain. We have newly discovered in our ancient culture the secret which is in us to accomplish what needs to be done both here on Taiwan and across the Strait.

Mencius is meaningful today as children in Taiwan are demonstrating this new truth, which will spread to mainland China with our 1.2 billion people. The whole of China has a glorious destiny in which we all can have a part to create and share with all the world in the new century that is coming.



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The Yoga of Abraham Lincoln

Tuesday February 6, 4:55 am ET

SAN JOSE, Calif., Feb. 6 /PRNewswire/ -- Did you know that Abraham Lincoln described himself as "a mystic"? And that he habitually mirrored the teachings of yoga and meditation? And that he shared attitudes with millions of Americans today who embrace a spiritual way of life?

In fact, a great master of yoga even said that Lincoln had been a Himalayan yogi in a past life!

Who knows if this is true? -- But one San Jose author, who studied Lincoln's history for eight years, uncovered more than 200 connections between the life of Abraham Lincoln and the deeper teachings of yoga!

Including:

- * Lincoln never joined a church (rare for his time). Lincoln once wrote a tract arguing against church doctrines as he heard them. There are many people like Lincoln today, who don't fit into a neat little box of religion as taught by generations before. Lincoln's objections paraphrased yoga's deeper teachings.
- * Lincoln's phenomenal physical strength. There are reports of Hindu yogis lifting boulders and heaving them. Abraham Lincoln as a young man lifted and carried a 600-pound chicken coop. Lincoln had tapped into what yogis call pranayama, or energy control.
- * Lincoln's prophetic dreams. Lincoln reported recurring dreams that he would ascend to a high office, then fall to his doom. Later, he dreamed of a White House funeral. Lincoln's prophetic dreams can be understood in yogic terms. A great sage of ancient India taught that when yogis perfect introspection, they receive communication from "higher spheres".
- * Lincoln was curious about psychics. He visited a New Orleans fortuneteller, and quizzed mediums in the White House. Similarly, many Americans nowadays visit psychics online, just as Hindu yogis have visited astrologers and other fortunetellers for centuries.
- * Lincoln was a meditator. From boyhood on, Lincoln used to spontaneously meditate. His wife once whacked him with a piece of wood after he had gone so deep within he hadn't heard her speaking! His eyes (visible in many Lincoln photos) assumed a half-open look -- a technique taught by meditation instructors.

Richard Salva is a minister, a meditation teacher, and a 30-year expert on yoga philosophy. He has given hundreds of talks in the United States and in Europe. His book, *Soul Journey from Lincoln to Lindbergh*, has received Five Stars from Foreword Clarion Reviews and The Midwest Book Review -- and he has appeared on NPR and 21st Century Radio.

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Source: Crystar Press

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